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Statement to International Conference on Sanctions Against South Africa

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Statement to International Conference on Sanctions Against South Africa

I am happy to convey to this Conference greetings and solidarity from the World Council of Churches. The WCC is a fellowship of churches bringing together three hundred churches from one hundred countries of the world.

As recently as August last year the Central Committee of the WCC called upon its member churches and all Christians:

"to press governments and international organizations to enforce comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, including a withdrawal of investments, an end to bank loans, arms embargo and oil sanctions and in general for the isolation of the state of South Africa."⁽¹⁾

From as long ago as 1928 the ecumenical movement, then speaking through the International Missionary Council, voiced concern about the relationship between organized racism and political and financial support for maintaining racism. In the 1948 First Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in a statement called "the Social Function of the Church" a position was adopted which stated that the church could only say "a convincing word" to society about justice and human dignity if it took steps to eliminate the practices of discrimination and segregation.

In these positions and others we know that we are not alone. We join a vast assembly of countries and organizations which are pressing for the complete isolation of South Africa so as to minimize the costs of the fundamental eradication of apartheid. We note that the

(1) Document No. 33, Statement on South Africa, August 1980

the OAU has repeatedly called for "the mobilization of world public opinion in support of the effective application of economic and other sanctions against South Africa." (2) Recent international seminars on transnational corporations, oil, arms violations and bank loans have stated clearly "that there must be sanctions applied against the South African apartheid regime." And in spite of the triple veto exercised by South Africa's traditional allies, France, Britain, and the USA, the 30 April 1981 overwhelming vote in the UN Security Council in support of the resolutions brought by the UN Africa Group signals the fact of South Africa's increasing isolation in the world's community of nations.

Mr. Chairman, friends, apartheid is far from finished. This conference is but part of our work of pressing anew for sanctions against apartheid. Developments in South Africa and global developments wherein key Western countries are openly embracing the South African police state should only serve to intensify our ardour to combat the apartheid regime.

Today the South African State has developed what it calls a "total strategy" to contend with both its internal threats and the growing international pressure to isolate South Africa. Essentially, this "total strategy" is to militarize every sphere of South African society. From a total strength of 260,000 in 1974 the total number of troops under arms now approximates nearly 500,000; a defense budget which was \$ 933 million for 1974/75 is estimated at a phenomenal \$ 2.9 billion in 1979/80. White school aged children - boys and girls aged 11-15 - are now being primed for military service through secondary

(2) Council of Ministers, OAU, Resolution on the application of sanctions against the racist and Minority Regimes in Southern Africa, CM/Res 734 (XXXIII) July 1979.

school cadet programmes and adventure camps which include political indoctrination courses, marksmanship and "terrorist hunts." Lastly, apartheid's military speed-up includes the creation of "ethnic battalions" - the drafting (with widespread coverage and publicity!) of blacks and coloureds into combat roles.

Today the South Africa government continues to provide secret funds and engage in secret projects to wage "dis-information" offensives against persons and organizations like the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and various anti-apartheid organizations the world over. We especially note the growing attacks by the South African government on church people exercising their ministry in Namibia and South Africa. These attacks on pastors and church workers - ranging from the seizure of passports and bannings in South Africa to torture and detentions in Namibia - are one part of a continuum of South African aggression which now include daily military attacks, raids, and subversion aimed at refugee centers in neighbouring African countries. But we are clear in our understanding of these activities. Far from any pretense at a peaceful resolution of the Southern African conflicts, the attacks show the apartheid government's resolve to turn Southern Africa into a theater of war, including if necessary, the use of nuclear weapons.

We are strengthened in our convictions by the fact of the struggle inside South Africa. Our work in a most profound manner is empowered not only by our belief that "racism is a sin against God and against fellow human beings" but also by the generations inside who have resisted and who continue to do so.

Our colleague Bishop Desmond Tutu has been widely quoted recently for saying:

Those who invest in South Africa should please do so with their eyes open. They must not delude themselves that they are doing anything for the benefit of blacks. Please let us at least get rid of this humbug. They must understand that they are buttressing one of the most vicious systems since Nazism.⁽³⁾

What he went on to say and what was not so widely quoted is that in South Africa today there is a growing hatred and hostility especially amongst younger blacks determined to be free. "They are committed" he pointed out, "in the face of police dogs and bullets, tear gas, prison and even death in their determination to usher freedom into South Africa, for both Black and White."

Mr. Chairman, friends, we approach this most important conference conscious of the fears and failures of the churches, and conscious of the continuing challenge which the dismantlement of the apartheid system represents for all of us. But we also approach this conference emboldened by clear indications that in spite of those principalities - like the Reagan administration - who seek to embrace apartheid nazism there is as well a growing tide of churches, unions, city governments, state governments and countries who seek to be counted only with those brave people inside, black and white, men and women, who continue traveling the pathways of resistance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity.

(3) Tutu, Bishop Desmond, An Address to the Assembly of the British Council of Churches, London, 31 March 1981.